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1870

AMNESTY.

REMARKS

OF

Hon. GEO. C. McKEE, of Miss.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, DECEMBER 20, 1870.

The House having under consideration the Amnesty Bill, under the operation of the ten-minutes' rule—

Mr. McKEE said :

Mr. Speaker, believing as I do in universal amnesty, I advocate the passage of this bill. It is not all I desire. If I had my own way untrammelled I would make it far broader than it is. But I believe this is the best we can get at this session, and, as a practical man, I will take what I can get. We rarely obtain all we desire at one effort, and whatever may be done hereafter, believing in amnesty full and free, I will not, in behalf of my constituents who are to be benefited, reject the advantages of this bill because it does not meet all the requirements of our case. I do not wish to grasp for all and lose everything. This is a great step in the right direction, and so far as it goes I accept it, while I shall continue to vote as I have voted all along for individual amnesty, for special amnesty, for partial amnesty, and, whenever I can do so practically, I shall vote for universal amnesty.

I wish to say in response to what has been said by the gentleman from Tennessee [Mr. Prosser] that it is undoubtedly true that in our section of the country, in Mississippi and Tennessee, there are too many KuKlux outrages; but I ask practical men if that is any good reason why disqualification should prevail? Is it any reason, because men have been murdered, that punishment of the murderer should be disqualification from holding office?

The punishment is too ludicrous ; it is too absurd to say if a man commits an outrage like that the gentleman has spoken of he shall not hold office under the United States.

Nor do I believe, like the gentleman from Virginia, [Mr. DUKE,] that amnesty should be granted to the people of the South because they fought so bravely against the Government, even if they did believe they were right in so doing. Such logic would acquit all great criminals, and punish the lesser ones only. It would be but holding out a premium for even bolder struggles against the Government in the future. It is enough, in all conscience, to give amnesty for disloyalty, without asking that that amnesty shall be given as a meritorious reward for the very boldness and persistence of such disloyalty. Such talk, however flattering to our Southern constituents, will never bring about the amnesty for which we labor. I am not sent here to clamor over wrongs, real or fancied.

My constituents want useful practice, not vain repinings or idle theories. We want votes, not eloquence ; we want results, not resolutions ; we want in our favor not empty declamation, but decisive action. There is no force in those men who dream brave dreams yet live resultless lives. It is idle folly, and to the people of the South it is gross injury, to make this bill so broad that it cannot go through the narrow gateway of yonder Senate. A defeat is just as disastrous to us whether it comes from open enemies or ill-advised friends. If we do not load down this bill we can carry it through the House, and secure at least so much of advantage. If it passes the Senate and becomes a law, the exceptions are so few that we will have practically almost universal amnesty. And at any and all times hereafter, if any one, especially any of the Democracy, who now denounce this bill and aspire to be the champions *par excellence* of universal amnesty, will introduce a bill for universal amnesty, I will go with them, work with them, and vote with them, though I should be the only Republican on this floor so doing.

As a Republican, I wish this amnesty bill to pass a Republican Congress as a Republican measure. Our Chicago platform contemplates the passage of an amnesty bill, and, in its own language, looked forward to the day when all disabilities imposed

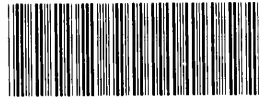
upon the late rebels should be removed. That day has come. The time is now. Let us give amnesty freely and cheerfully. There is often more in the manner of the giving than in the gift itself. Delay is but injurious to the Republican party. It places the Republicans of the South in a false and unpleasant position. It makes us almost enemies and aliens among our neighbors. It is the worst of political blunders to imagine that people can be forced to love a party. You cannot compel friendship. He who would have friends must himself be friendly. Any party seeking the support of the people must seek it through their friendship and respect, not through their hates or their fears. If the Republican party wishes to build itself up in the South, if it wishes to perpetuate its power, if it wishes to secure a lodgment in the hearts of the people, it must do it by love and respect, not by disfranchisement and hate. It must learn the lesson, and learn it well, that—

“Every gate that’s barred to Hate
Shall open wide to Love.”

Men who are not statesmen, but politicians only, can learn a lesson from our Mississippi elections. We went into the canvass as avowed, open Republicans, standing upon the straight Republican platform, yielding no point of the Republican faith, and we also emblazoned on our banners those magic words of talismanic power to white and black, “universal suffrage, universal amnesty,” and, like Constantine of old, “by this sign we conquered.”

Why delay the passage of this bill? Every one in this Hall knows that sooner or later amnesty will prevail. If this Congress will not pass it the next one surely will. Then why boggle and chaffer with inevitable fate? Why oppose the certain march of destiny? Is it because politicians are trying to make trading capital of it? The heart of the American people is too great and too liberal to allow its generous sentiments to be huckstered in the market-place by trading politicians.

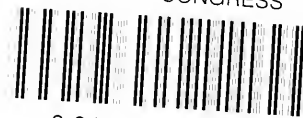
As a Union soldier, who served through all the years of bloody war, I advocate this bill. There are other lessons to be learned in war than the lessons of passion and hate. Courtesy and magnanimity to a brave enemy and generosity to a fallen foe are the lessons which every true soldier learned. And furthermore, as a citizen and Representative of Mississippi, I earnestly plead for the



passage of this bill. It would be an act of grace to the constituents, and also of favor and justice to the Representatives. I do not wish to have it said that I represent upon this floor a partially-gagged and muzzled constituency. It is contrary to the principles of a free Government. Every Representative should be amenable to the judgment of all of his constituents.

In considering this matter, let us put behind us the hate and bitterness of the war. While we heed and remember the stern lessons it taught, let us try to bury out of sight the passions and prejudices which it engendered: let this House set the noble example. Let us extend the olive branch of peace, shorn of not a single leaf. Let us try to exorcise and banish forever the dark demons of hate and passion now flitting through the South, and welcome back the white-robed angel of peace, "whose wings shall scatter healings through the land." Then will the Southern States come up to the full measure of their greatness, and the pen of wise-judging history shall record that the American nation arose from the death-struggle ennobled by patriotism and loyalty, purified by war and commotion, gloried by amnesty and pardon.

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